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Small-Scale Agriculture Today

Office for Small-Scale Agriculture



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U.S. Department of Agriculture - Cooperative State Research Service - Agricultural Research For A Better Tomorrow

AT ISSUE...LISTEN

"This is the basic rule of selling. Listen to your customers when they talk to you and you will hear what they want to buy.

Stew Leonard runs one of the most successful supermarkets in the United States in Norwalk, Connecticut. Tom Peters lists him as an outstanding example in his new book, *Passion for Excellence*. This year, Stew will make the Guinness Book of World Records for doing more business per square foot than any store of any kind...in the world! He edged out Marks and Spencer in England for the number one spot. More than 100,000 people visit his store every week, and he does more than \$80 million a year.

We visited him one day and watched him talking to customers who bought fresh flowers from his just opened floral department. He asked them if they liked the assortment. Were the prices right? Should he offer plants and flowers? All the time he was talking and they were answering, a young man stood off to the side writing down the replies. When he finished, he told the young man to have the notes typed and give them to his son, and "tell him that's his buying plan for tomorrow."

No statistics. No number crunching. Just talking to the customers and asking them what they wanted to buy..." (Direct Marketing, January 1987)

...AND WORD OF MOUTH

"What some small business operators really mean when they say they rely heavily on word-of-mouth advertising is that they don't do any promotion of any kind but simply take whatever business comes their way. Word-of-mouth is inexpensive and it can be very effective, but it is not always easy to use. By itself, word-of-mouth advertising is slow, unpredictable, and lacks momentum. It needs a push to get it going.

How can you stimulate word-of-mouth advertising to give it some momentum? First, you cannot buy favorable word-of-mouth endorsements from present customers to their

friends. You must earn and encourage such endorsements. After you have earned customer confidence, you then ask your satisfied customers to pass the good word along to their friends. They will be happy to do this if they are truly satisfied and if they are asked. Participating in your word-of-mouth campaign also solidifies their relationship with your small business by giving customers a sense of participation.

A good time to ask present customers for their help is when they are most satisfied. For example, a good time would be after a satisfying customer purchase or after a customer complaint has been handled in a most satisfactory way. A referral card system that offers some small gift or bonus to the present and/or new customer is one method for giving some momentum to word-of-mouth advertising.

Who can use word-of-mouth advertising? Many small firms can if their owner/operators are willing to invest the time and effort. But it doesn't just happen all by itself. You have to help it along by (a) giving them the word to talk about, (b) asking them to talk about your farm, and (c) making it easy for them to do so. Many successful small marketers have found that word-of-mouth is a valuable supplement to their major promotion efforts but not a replacement for a total promotion program." (From: *Advertising & Sales Promotion*, William H. Bramen, 1983) Note: Information contained above is provided courtesy of North American Strawberry Growers Association, ZAP Berry News, February 1988.

TOPICS AND TECHNOLOGY

First Ever - The 368-page "The Humane Consumer and Producer Guide (1993-94)" is a national listing of farmers and ranchers, and stores and restaurants that sell their products, plus supportive research and education organizations. Costs \$15 to get a copy, check payable to the HSUS. Contact: The Humane Society of the United States, The Humane Sustainable Agriculture Program, 2100 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20037; telephone 202-452-1100, Fax 301-258-3081.

Please Circulate

Contact - For a free brochure, listing video and audio tapes from the November 1993 Small Farm Today Seminar and Trade Show, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: Chuck DeCourley, Small Farm Today, 3903 W. Ridge Trail Road, Clark, MO 65243; telephone 1-800-633-2535.

Fiber Arts - The 320-page book "The New Fiberworks Sourcebook" is a "where-to-find-it" mail-order guide to supplies and services for the fiber arts providers and patrons. The software book costs \$17.95, postpaid. Contact: Bobbi A. McRae, Fiberworks Publications, P.O. Box 49770, Austin, TX 78765-9770; telephone 512-343-6112.

Asparagus - The 25-page bulletin "Asparagus Production, Management and Marketing" (Bulletin 826) covers all aspects of production through marketing, has color pictures, and costs \$6. Contact: Carl J. Cantaluppi, Piketon Research and Extension Center, Ohio State University, 1864 Shyville Rd., Piketon, OH 45661-9749; telephone 614-289-2071, Fax 614-289-4591.

Celebration - Both as farmers and consumers we have a responsibility to help the public understand the challenges the agriculture industry faces in continuing to meet and fulfill our food and fiber needs. Help celebrate National Agriculture Week, March 14-20, 1994. For more information, contact: Mark Bennett, Agriculture Council of America, 927 15th St., NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20005; telephone 202-682-9200.

All-Natural Product - "Ewe Mulch," made from a blend of wool and other natural fibers, provides weed control to perennial plants and tree seedlings. For additional information, price lists, samples, suggestions, contact: Todd Fackler, Applesseed Wool Corp., P.O. Box 101, 55 Bell St., Plymouth, OH 44865; telephone 419-687-9665.

Poster - Suitable for framing, a free large, full-color identification chart for fresh herbs, specialty lettuces and edible flowers, contact: Laura Tomlin, Quail Mountain Herbs, P.O. Box 1049, Watsonville, CA 95077; telephone 408-722-8456, Fax 408-722-9472.

Owner or Renter? - "Almost half of U.S. farmland owners rent their land to other families." This and other statistical information is found in "Who Owns America's Farmland?" (SB193-10). To obtain a free copy, contact: Customer Services Division, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC 20233-0001.

Butterfinger Milk - "Nestle has taken one of its candy brands into the dairy case with low-fat Butterfinger milk, which the company says tastes like chocolate and peanut butter." (The Wall Street Journal, October 15, 1993, p. 1B)

Update - "Bees that attacked people and killed two dogs in Peoria, Arizona, were of the aggressive Africanized strain, State agriculture officials said. They have killed 150 people in Mexico, 1 in Texas." (The New York Times, October 14, 1993, p. 3A)

Talk About Food - The Progressive Farmer Country Place Cookbook, a new 128-page soft-cover book presents the best of the best recipes for a quick family meal or a special celebration. Send \$12.90 to Progressive Farmer, Country Place Cookbook, Box 830069, Birmingham, AL 35283-0069; telephone 205-877-6000.

Chicken Tonight? - "This is the Chinese year of the rooster, but it is the U.S. broiler industry that has much to crow about. For the 13th consecutive year, Americans will eat a record amount of chicken -- an average of at least 71 pounds -- 50 percent greater than the average amount in the late 1970's and double that in the late 1960's." (Mid-Atlantic Poultry Farmer, August 24, 1993, p. 4)

Tip - This spring, make joint seed purchases with friends and neighbors. It's one way to use up seeds quickly and all participants save money.

New - "Specialty Cut Flowers: The Production of Annuals, Perennials, Bulbs, and Woody Plants for Fresh and Dried Cut Flowers" is a unique new 392-page book, bringing together in one place the most recent information on specialty cut flower crops. The cost is \$39.95, plus \$4.00 shipping. Contact: Art Wells, Timber Press, 9999 S.W. Wilshire, Suite 124, Portland, OR 97225; telephone 1-800-327-5680, Fax 503-292-6607.

Buffalo - "By 1900, fewer than a thousand and possibly as few as 300, remained in the country. Thus dawned the era of the buffalo as a conservation object. Today their population in the United States has rebounded to 130,000 to 150,000, mostly on private ranches and the buffalo are no longer in danger." (The New York Times, October 19, 1993, p. 13C)

Deer Population - "Once reduced to about 500,000 a century ago, an estimated 25 million deer now roam nationwide, says the Wildlife Management Institute. Add the fact that these days there are a lot more people inhabiting the United States and that deer find fewer places to live, thanks to cities, suburbs and interstates." (The Washington Times, July 5, 1993, p. 4C)

EPA - "Wary cedar-chest owners around the country can now breathe a sigh of relief: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has decided that cedar wood is a safe alternative to pesticides for repelling moths and mildew." (The Wall Street Journal, August 9, 1993, p. 23C)

Help - "AG-LINK offers emergency counseling but will also follow through with financial advice to help farm families get back on their feet. The AG-LINK hotline can be reached at 1-800-864-1594. For information about the service: AG-LINK, P.O. Box 24000, Oklahoma City, OK 73134." (SALT, June 1993, p. 2)

Free - The publication "Sweet Sorghum Culture and Syrup Production" is part of a project to expand sorghum production and track new technologies of syrup processing. To obtain a copy, contact: Paul L. Mask, Extension Hall, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849-5633; telephone 205-844-5490.

Winners - If you are interested in a complete list of all 568 cultivars introduced as All-American Selection (AAS) Winners since 1933, contact: AAS, 1311 Butterfield Road, Suite 310, Downers Grove, IL 60515; telephone 708-963-0770.

Tip - When pruning, i.e., grapes, peaches, etc., it is important to be looking ahead at least 2 years.

Declining Projections - "The Agriculture Department projects the U.S. share of the world corn exports will slip to 64.7 percent during the year ending September 1994 from 70.2 percent in the crop year just ended, while America's share of world soybean trade shrinks to a record low of 60 percent from 71 percent. In wheat, which is generally harvested earlier, the U.S. share is expected to drop to 30.5 percent in the year ending June 1994 from 33.9 percent in the previous year." (*The Wall Street Journal*, October 21, 1993, p. 1A)

Sharing of Knowledge - "Herb Gatherings" is a bimonthly newsletter and costs \$15, United States - \$20, Canada. Contact: Carla J. Nelson, 10949 East 200 South, Lafayette, IN 47905-9453; telephone 317-296-3211.

Pigs - "The United Kingdom is a forerunner in all aspects of pig technology worldwide and we're seen as a source of the most advanced genetic breeding stock," says Tony Walker, senior pig consultant at Adas, the government's farm advisory service. Leading pig breeding companies in the United Kingdom export their animals across the globe and five companies have developed links with leading breeders in the large United States market in recent years." (*Financial Times*, October 19, 1993, p. 9)

Bigger - A new world record for a pumpkin, 836 pounds, was established in October 1993; formerly the record was 827 pounds. For more information, contact: Ray Waterman, World Pumpkin Confederation, 14050 Rt. 62, Collins, NY 14034; telephone 716-532-5995.

Tip - Readers of this newsletter are requested to give prompt notice of change of address, giving the old address (send label) as well as the new.

Game Birds - For information about a new game-bird brooder for quail, pheasants and chickens, contact: Merrilee Kumle, Hawkeye/Bower, Inc., Box 2000, Houghton, IA 52631; telephone 319-469-4141.

CHRISTMAS STORY

"It's still a bit early for Christmas stories, but this is a good one.

Deer love Christmas trees almost as much as people do. It's not uncommon for commercial growers to lose most of their young plantation stock to hungry whitetails, which can also do a real number on fruit tree orchards.

In Missouri, growers have tried commercial repellents and electric fences without much success. High 'deer-proof' fences do work but they cost as much as \$5 a foot. One grower tried spreading tiger dung to frighten the deer away, but the whitetails continued to trash his trees.

Now, after a 3-year experiment, the Missouri Department of Conservation has found a solution--dogs and invisible fences. The dogs chase the deer out, and in turn are kept in by a buried wire that surrounds the trees and emits a radio signal. The dogs wear receiver collars, and if they get too close to the 'fence,' they get shocked.

It takes about 3 days to train two dogs to guard trees. The cost of the radio wire is less than \$1,000 for an average tree farm or orchard. The dogs, and dog food, are extra." (*Upfront, Field & Stream*, October 1993, p. 5)

TECHNOLOGY VS. FARMING

"According to Stewart Smith, University of Maine economist, non-farm activity is displacing farmers. His analysis shows that farming -- i.e., the farmer's share of the economic activity involved in delivering food to consumers -- has fallen from 41 percent in 1910 to 9 percent in 1990. While in the same period, the input sector's share increased from 15 percent to 24 percent and the marketing sector's share increased from 44 percent to 67 percent. Smith says that if this trend continues, farmers' share will reach zero in another 25 years. Smith's analysis is supported by Minnesota's hog production data. According to the Minnesota agricultural statistics service, the number of hog operations declined by more than half in the last decade, from around 35,000 in 1990 to 14,000 in 1991, while overall inventory of hogs reached its highest mark in 1990." (*MFA Digest*, Minnesota Food Association, April 1993, p. 1)

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 8-11, 1994 - GrowerExpo '94, Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, IL. Contact: Mark Stojack, GrowerExpo, P.O. Box 9, Batavia, IL 60510; telephone 708-208-9080.

January 9-11, 1994 - Ninth Annual National Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference, Pheasant Run Resort and Convention Center, St. Charles, IL. Contact: Lowell Lenschow, Illinois Specialty Growers Association, 1701 Towanda Avenue, Bloomington, IL 61702-2901; telephone 309-557-2107.

January 26, 1994 - Special Forest Products Exposition, Washington County Fairgrounds, Hillsboro, OR. Contact: Maggie Rogers, Western Forestry and Conservation Association, 4033 SW Canyon Rd., Portland, OR 97221; telephone 503-275-9555.

January 28-29, 1994 - South Carolina Small Farms Conference, South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, South Carolina. Contact: Verna DeVoe, South Carolina Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 11280, Columbia, SC 29211; telephone 803-734-2200.

February 4-5, 1994 - West Virginia Direct Marketing Conference, Cliffside, Harpers Ferry, WV. Contact: Delmar R. Yoder, West Virginia University Extension Service, 2102 Agricultural Sciences Building, Morgantown, WV 26506-6108; telephone 304-293-3408.

February 5, 1994 - Shiitake Mushroom Growers Conference, Pipestem Resort State Park, Princeton, WV. Contact: Paul Goland, Hardscrabble Enterprises, Inc., HC 71, Box 42, Circleville, WV 26804; telephone 304-358-2921.

February 13-16, 1994 - North America Strawberry Growers Association, Niagara Falls, Ontario. Contact: Bill Courter, Route 1, Simpson, IL 62985; telephone 618-949-3884.

February 16-19, 1994 - Mid-Atlantic Direct Marketing Conference, Princess Royale, Ocean City, MD. Contact: Jarvis Cain, University of Maryland, Symons Hall, College Park, MD 20742; telephone 301-405-1265.

March 3-6, 1994 - North American Deer Farmers Association (NADeFA) Annual Conference, New Orleans Airport Hilton in New Orleans, LA. Contact: Barbara Ramey Fox, NADeFA, 9301 Annapolis Rd., Suite 206, Lanham, MD 20706; telephone 301-459-7708, Fax 301-459-7864.

March 14-16, 1994 - School: Asparagus, Strawberry and Ohio Small Fruit Schools on respective days, held at the Piketon Research and Extension Center, Piketon, OH. Contact: Carl J. Cantaluppi, 1864 Shyville Rd., Piketon, OH 45661-9749; telephone 614-289-2071; Fax 614-289-4591.

March 27, 1994 - Maine Maple Sunday. Open house at sugarhouses across the State. Contact: Vicki Schmidt, Maine Maple Producers Association, RR 1, Box 927, Winthrop, ME 04364; telephone 207-377-6275.

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